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THE

LAST DISCOURSE,

PREACHED

ON THE SABBATH BEFORE HIS DEATH,

BY

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TO THE READER.

A word of explanation is called for, in publishing this discourse. It was not written for publication. It is one of the Author's most plain, simple, and unpretending sermons, as all can testify, who have been accustomed to sit under his ministry. From notes which are written upon it, in the Author's hand, it seems to have been preached at Rodney, Red Lick, Natchez, and Port Gibson. It was the last sermon that he preached in those places; and in its delivery at Port Gibson, it was the last sermon that he preached before his death. It was preached there on Sabbath morning, August 31st, 1851,—and on Friday of the same week, September 5th, the venerable man fell by the hand of violence. The circumstances of his death are known to the public.

The Trustees of the College, in calling for its publication, have responded to a very general wish, expressed by those who have profitted for many years by Dr. Chamberlain's preaching. Many of his friends desired to have before them a pleasing memorial of the venerated Author, in the form of his last exhibition, in the pulpit, of the simple truth of the Gospel. At the close of the discourse, are some unfinished sentences: in these, as in all cases, the manuscript has been followed.

DISCOURSE.

"BUT ONE THING IS NEEDFUL; AND MARY HATH CHOSEN THAT GOOD PART WHICH SHALL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER."—*Luke*, x, 42.

THE circumstances of this passage were as follows: Our Saviour was on a visit at the house of Martha and Mary, in a small village on the Mount of Olives, in the vicinity of Jerusalem. The family consisted of the two sisters and their brother Lazarus. Martha, who seems to have been the head of the family, was industrious in preparing an entertainment for him; and seems to have been solicitous to have it served up in such a manner, as to correspond with the high regard she had for him. Mary, on the other hand, was solicitous to enjoy his conversation; and took an humble position at his feet to hear his instruction. This does not seem to be the first time that our Saviour had visited this family; for Martha, in all the frankness and confidence of an old friend, came to him to complain of Mary, for not assisting her. Our Saviour answers her in the same confidence, and gives her a gentle and delicate rebuke. He charges her with giving herself unnecessary trouble. He was easily satisfied. Social intercourse, and friendly interchange of sentiment, and affectionate regard, were of more importance than the richness and variety of the entertainment. One thing was sufficient. This was easily prepared and set forth. Mary, therefore, had displayed the wise course. She showed the state of her heart.

But in this kind rebuke he uses language, as he has done on other occasions, to teach the great truth, which he came from heaven to earth to teach,—the way of salvation; and to make a strong impression of its infinite importance on her mind. *The one thing* to which he alluded may, in the first instance, refer to one kind of food; but from this he refers and applies it to something infinitely more important and ever during. Martha was troubled about much serving, and the preparation of a great variety—for him, one dish was sufficient. But there was *one thing* which this could illustrate; Mary had chosen this *one thing*. It could never be taken from her. It would never fail. What is it?

It will be my object in this discourse, to answer this question, and show what is the *one thing needful;* to show how it is to be secured, and the evidences by which we may be satisfied that it is ours.

What is the *one thing needful?* To which we answer, that it consists of two things:—1st, a knowledge of the truth,—*a saving knowledge of the truth;* 2d, embracing the truth, from a love of it.

And now, the first question is, What is truth? The answer to this question is to be governed by the circumstances of this case. We must remember the grand object of our Saviour's mission into our world, and the work which he had to perform. His object was, to save our lost and ruined family; and His work was to do for us, what we could not do; and to be in all respects our substitute; and thus offer salvation, "without money and without price," to every one who would trust in Him. Now, in these circumstances, it is perfectly easy for us to see what is meant *by truth*. It is a knowledge of the *way of salvation*. We are sinners, hastening to death—hopeless in ourselves—helpless; and an awful and eternal doom awaiting us. On the other hand, God, in infinite mercy, had provided a way by which the *chief* of sinners could be saved, not only from the wrath of God, but be raised to honor and eternal life at his right hand. And this salvation is perfectly consistent with the attributes of God;—"honorable to God, and easy for man." This salvation is recommended by all the motives of time and eternity, and addressed to us, in every possible form; and founded upon our acceptance, by a consideration of our impending misery, and the life and glory to be received on our acceptance. Now, in such circumstances, the only truth worth knowing is, *this way of salvation*.

Any proposition on this subject, emanating from a respectable source, is worthy of commanding our most profound attention. Every thing else should be postponed, or laid aside, and our whole soul should be employed on this alone. The attention of the whole world has been turned to this subject, in all ages. Whether true or false, when proposed by a respectable authority, it deserves our first attention. Our Saviour said, this was his sole business in our world—and to command attention, he gave every evidence of sincerity and truth. He lived a blameless life—was constantly engaged in works of benevolence, and performed the most stupendous miracles, to prove that his mission was Divine. And from that day to this, his Gospel has been the foundation from which every temporal and spiritual blessing has flowed. Now, in these circumstances, it is perfectly easy to know what is the *one thing needful*. Mary was well acquainted with all these facts and miracles. She believed that Jesus was the Son of God—that He came to save our lost and ruined family—that He was now engaged in this benevolent work—that every day and hour—that every opportunity was important, and was resolved to lose no time in securing it as her own. She took her position, as a simple-hearted learner; and desired to know the plan of salvation, with a determination to do every thing on her part to secure it.

But it is one thing to know the truth, and it is a very different thing to love it, and embrace it, and obey it. Many men are well enlightened on the plan of redemption, but have no love for it. They actually hate it. It is, perhaps, impossible to find a man who does not know that he is fast hastening to the grave; but there are thousands of this class who are totally indifferent about this serious truth. They think about it as little as possible, and often endeavor to banish all reflections of death and eternity from their

minds. All the gay and fashionable world are engaged in this business. The pleasure-loving, and the money-seeking part of mankind, are all engaged in this business of banishing serious reflections on religion from their minds. And nearly all the young are engaged in this business.

And there are many men, who have carefully studied the Gospel and understand its doctrines, who have no love for it. They hate it. They believe it to be true, and yet they disregard it. It is said, that even "the devils believe and tremble;" but they never love, nor obey. Many men will even talk well on the subject of religion, and praise its doctrines and influence, but yet will not love it, nor obey it. Only let some worldly consideration come into competition, and you will at once see the state of their hearts. Only let a fashionable amusement be gotten up, and if it should occur at the same time of some religious exercises, you will be able to judge of the state of their hearts. You will often see such men desecrate the Sabbath, in order to gain some pecuniary advantage, or to advance some worldly interest. Their funds and their labor are freely bestowed in almost every thing else, than to promote the cause of piety. It is, therefore, a very different thing to understand the truth, on the one hand; and to love it, and embrace it, and obey it, on the other. The *one thing needful* embraces these two things—a knowledge of the truth, and the loving and obeying it. The first is of no avail, without the other. A man may have all knowledge—he may even give his body to the stake, and yet be nothing but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. He must love as well as know. He must love and obey the truth, or all his knowledge will be vain, and worse than in vain. These two things, then, to know and to embrace the truth, from a love of it, constitute the *one thing needful*.

And this is emphatically the one thing needful. This can never be taken away. And it is always available. It justifies the sinner; it saves him from perdition, and elevates him to heaven. He may be poor in this world, but this makes him rich,—"God and heaven are still his own."—He may be despised by the world, yet he has honor with God and all the heavenly host. He may be led to the stake and consumed in the flame, yet this one thing is safe. He himself is safe. His Saviour will take him to himself.

Contrast this one thing with any thing and every thing else. They are nothing in comparison with it. Riches make to themselves wings, and fly away. And besides, very few men ever can acquire riches. The great mass of men are poor, have always been poor, and always will be poor. None are absolutely rich. They are only comparatively so. Some are richer than others. But if it were possible for men to attain wealth, yet they cannot use it, or retain it. It may leave them; but they must surely leave it. Death will soon separate them from it. They brought nothing with them, and surely they can take nothing away with them. But this *one thing needful* is available by all who will accept it. It is suited for all,—the high, the low, the rich and the poor, the bond and the free. It is equally accessible to all,—the young and the old, the living and the dying. It is our comfort in the hours of trouble, and it heightens and sanctifies all our joys.

It even removes our troubles; for it opens beyond them a world of life and glory, so that our sorrows here may be compared to the fleeting shadows from the clouds which pass over the earth. And it can never be taken away.

Worldly pleasures can last only a short time. They are never perfectly satisfactory, and always become the more unsatisfying in proportion as they are indulged. At first, they may seem pleasant, but soon they become uninteresting, and at last, disgusting and intolerable. Change them as you may, they soon wear out, or they will soon wear you out. But after all that may be pretended in their behalf, they are transitory; and the poor devotee of pleasure must lie down in a comfortless grave, and his soul be driven into eternal darkness and despair.

It would be unnecessary to contrast this *one thing needful* with honor, or any of the other objects which men strive to obtain. They are all transitory, and unworthy the undivided exertions of an immortal being.

This *one thing needful* is the same which is, in other parts of the Scriptures, called by a different name. The peculiar phraseology of the Saviour on this occasion, is suited to the circumstances. Martha was troubled about *much serving*, about the preparation of many things; He tells her, that one thing was sufficient; and takes occasion from this to teach the grand truth for which He came into this world, and to impress upon her mind, that this was the one *thing needful;* it was the only thing worth living for; and it shall never be taken away, or be lost. The same thing is sometimes called *the pearl of great price*, and for which all other things should be cheerfully exchanged. It is sometimes called *the kingdom of God*, which we should seek first of all things, and to enter into which, we should strive with all our soul. And at other times it is, in plain language, called salvation. In each of these cases, and in all others, our Saviour adapts his language to the circumstances, and uses such as would be calculated to make the strongest impression upon His hearers.

The *one thing needful*, then, is an experimental knowledge of the truth; and this will be attested by a sincere obedience of it. It is a great mistake to suppose that this one thing needful is acquired by obedience. It is first to be possessed, before there can be any obedience. It is like the beginning of life. Nothing can act before existence. There must be life before action. So, we must know the truth and embrace it, before there can be any obedience of it. This is the starting point of christian life; and obedience of the truth, and performance of christian duty are the fruits and evidences of christian life, or that we have the *one thing needful*.

"This is eternal life, to know Thee, the only living and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

The second thing on which I promised to remark is, to illustrate the way in which this *one thing needful* can be secured. And this may be stated to be, a simple reliance of heart on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; an honest and hearty acceptance of His overtures of mercy and mediation. By a reference to the case of Mary, we can learn, how she chose the *one thing needful*, and how she secured it as her own: "Mary took her seat

at the feet of Jesus, and heard his word." A more childlike simplicity is hard to be found. She resigns all confidence in herself, in her own knowledge, her own judgment, or her own power. She is willing to hear and learn, and is ready to believe whatever is said. She has entire and unqualified confidence in Him in all respects; as her Teacher, her Friend, her Redeemer, her King—an entire resignation of herself into His hands. She believed all He said, and would strive to do all that He would require her to do; knowing that His grace would be sufficient for all her need. The *one thing needful* in her case, was secured by simply believing all He said—a solicitude to hear His instructions. Her case may be illustrated by one who is thirsty. The Psalmist describes his own case in these words: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." This seems to have been Mary's case, when she took her seat at the feet of Jesus, and desired to hear His words. She had a proper appreciation of His character, and therefore believed all He said. This secured to her the *one thing needful;* for Jesus gave to her the instruction which she desired. In plain language, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the *one thing needful;* for it secures everything—pardon, justification, peace, perseverance, hope, joy; Christian character, triumph in death, and eternal life in Heaven.

In many places of the Scriptures, this same exercise is described in different language. We are sometimes commanded to *strive;* at other times, to *seek;* at other times, to *knock;* and various other expressions are employed, to suit the different circumstances of sinners; but they all signify the same thing. They are figurative expressions; and when stripped of their metaphorical dress, they signify, the exercise of faith. They all imply, an earnestness of soul, a fixedness of purpose; and when we use plain language, they mean, an entire and unqualified reliance upon the righteousness of Christ, and a resignation of our will unreservedly to Him.

I desire to impress your minds with the necessity of this reliance being perfect and unreserved. And I would teach this from the fact of its being the *one thing needful;* without this, all things else are vain. *None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good.* Let me ask, How do men act and think in all other cases of danger, when they know there is but one way of escape? All other dependences are at once abandoned or thrown away. In their ignorance, men may try many expedients; but in all cases when they are enlightened, and know that there is but *one thing* by which they can be saved, and this *one thing* accessible and within their reach, how cheerfully all other things are abandoned, and with what ardor do they cling to this *one thing needful.* Look at the man who is in danger of drowning. After having made exertions to save himself, in vain, and finding his danger becoming every moment greater and more inevitable, on the approach of a rescue, he will at once resign himself to it,—he will renounce everything else. All he wants to know, in such a case, is, that the rescue is available and sufficient. This resignation of himself into the hands of his rescue, is *faith.* In this illustration, the rescue is represented as a friendly hand ex-

tended to him; and *faith* consists in taking hold of it. Whilst this may be correct in some particulars, yet it would be better to represent the rescue as taking hold of the drowning man; (Jesus took hold of Peter;) placing his hands underneath him; and his business is, to lie, passive, in the hands of his deliverer. This, in such a case, is—to be still, and see the salvation of God.

This subject may be illustrated by the case of a blind man. He is unable to direct his way; he knows there is danger on every hand; a single misstep may be his ruin; he may hear the call of a friend, but is afraid to move; —but the moment this friend takes hold of him, he relinquishes everything else, resigns his own judgment, all dependence on himself, and clings to his kind friend.

Many other illustrations of the same kind, might be given; all going to show, that the *one thing needful* is secured by renouncing everything else, and yielding entirely and unreservedly to this alone.

But there is one preparation necessary, in order to induce sinners to do this,—and that is, a full and thorough conviction of their lost and helpless condition, on the one hand; and the willingness and ability of Christ to save them, on the other.

A man in danger of drowning, will not look for help so long as he is ignorant of his situation; and if assistance be offered, he will refuse it. Thus, a sinner will reject the Lord Jesus Christ, so long as he apprehends no danger, or has within himself the power of shunning it. A blind man, so long as he believes that he is able to direct his own steps, or grope his way, when there is no danger, will disdain all assistance. Thus, a sinner, who is blind to his lost and hopeless condition, will decline all assistance and direction from the Lord Jesus Christ. And this he will continue to do, until he feels that he is going down to everlasting death; and that all his own efforts are vain. Then, and not till then, will he renounce himself and all else, and resign himself into the hands of his Saviour; then, and not till then, will he, like the Publican, smite upon his breast, and say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner;" or, like Mary, take his seat at the feet of Jesus, and hear His words.

The *one thing needful* is secured by resigning ourselves into the hands of Jesus Christ, trusting in His righteousness, leaning on His grace, and becoming entirely obedient to His will—*to know no will but His;* and this, in theological language, is *faith*.

But some men think that this is very difficult. But let me ask, is it a difficult work for a drowning man, to resign himself to the rescuing hand? or, is it a hard work for a blind man, to yield himself to be led at the will of his kind friend? The whole difficulty in believing in Christ, consists in feeling right. If we feel our lost and helpless condition in all its fearful reality, then to yield the heart to Christ, is a spontaneous emotion; and along with this, when we are assured that Christ is just the Saviour we need, it would be hard to refrain from giving Him our hearts. And, accordingly, some believers are described as taking the kingdom of God by vio-

lence. There is a kind of rush. "I thought on my ways," says the Psalmist, "I made haste, I delayed not."

I promised to make a remark on the evidences by which we may be satisfied, that this *one thing needful* is our own. At present, I have time to give you but one; and that is, by living consistently with the belief that it is the *one thing needful*,—that all other things are subordinate to it. If we carefully observe the conduct of any man, we may easily discover, what he considers the *one thing needful*. The man of pleasure makes all other things bend to the gratification of his passions. The covetous man makes every thing else bend to the acquisition of wealth. And the ambitious man makes every thing bend to the acquisition of honor, title or distinction. And by observing our own life and conduct, we can easily learn our own ruling passion. The man who considers the salvation of his soul the *one thing needful*, will make all other things bend to this. His business will be arranged so as not to interfere with his religious duties. His pleasures will all be consistent with a religious life—all others will be abandoned and rejected. All worldly honors, titles and distinctions are made subordinate to the laws of Christ. He is a consistent man. All other evidences besides this are unsatisfactory. I do not say, that they are all vain and useless; but they are unsatisfactory, and without this they are generally vain and dangerous. The inconsistent Christian is like the drowning man, who, for a while, clings to his rescue, and rejoices for a short time, and then lets go and tries his own strength. His danger is greater than at first, or, like the blind man, &c., danger greater.

The only satisfactory evidence is a consistent life—temper of the mind, &c.

We often find that we have wandered away and lived inconsistent, &c.;—discouraged;—remedy is repentance, &c.

Two remarks: 1. In all the various exhortations, &c., we come to one thing, *i. e.* faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 2. Destitute of this, all other things are vain.

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